wisdom of silence, which is mistaken by them for *a* symptom of stjpi-
dity. As she grows up, Maisie understands the nature of the relation-
ship between her parents. She comes to know of the several affairs
of her mother, and is bold enough to tel! the Captain, who is in love
with her mother, not to be 'like others' in loving her mother for only a
short whiJe. On one occasion, as she v/alks on the beach with Sir
Claude, she finds him absent-minded and presently understands that
Sir Claude's attention is engaged in observing "the fine stride and
shining limbs of a young fishwife who had just waded out of the sea
with her basketful of shrimps/'[3] This image dramatises the corruptive
possibilities of a 'sseing' which is limited to the moronic range of
superficial 'objectivity' - a seeing which does not evolve into an ordar
of discriminating, self-edifying values. Values, on the contrary, have,
in this world of mere seeing and mere seeming, degenerated into
things and their attributes. Real 'insight' could transform things seen
into a system of felt sensibility, which is missing here. The analogy
is tangential; it is incapable of establishing a connection between
various orders of experience. Hence it is that the metaphor, instead
of clarifying, only obscures reality.

On another occasion, as Mrs. Wix discourses on the 'moral
sense', the girl's mind wanders to the music of a guitar, and a couple
singing of 'amour'. "Maisie knew what 'amour' meant too, and
wondered if Mrs. Wix did."[4]- Maisie's girlish passion for Sir Claude
makes her a rival to Mrs. Beale. Knowing Sir Claude's weakness to
be a sexual one, Maisie decides to offer her virginity to him in order to
possess him - an act of furtive self-expression and rebellious intimacy
seeking to assault the fortress of adult reality in order to grow into
maturity. She is prepared to give up even Mrs. Wix, if Sir Claude
gives up Mrs. Beale and comes to live with her. Henry James in-his
Preface refers to 'the death of her (Maisie's) childhood', which is
dramatised in the novel. A corrupt world has successfully corrupted

an innocent girl, although it has also released the pent-up currents of individual life in her. A stranger to the affections of her parents, a witness to acts of selfishness, and a spectator to shameless 'affairs* of men and women, Maisie grows up to 'know everything' about the wicked world, and herself falls a victim to its corruption and depravity.

*What Maisie Knew* thus "deals with the violation of Maisie's innocence, with her corruption/'[6] but lodges one's imagination in the paradox of all vital life. In this world of evil and corruption, the necessary taste of experience tests on the enormous proposition that